

The knit sweater

CRAFTS · 47

291 called a "ganzie," is not a traditional item of wear, as is
[175] commonly asserted by writers, but was introduced in the 1890s as a cottage indus-
[657] try by the Congested Districts Board, which sent instructors to Inis Beag to teach
the women there the manner of knitting the intricate patterns. Only children wear
the ganzie, for men always have preferred a dark sweater of simple design which
[531] is indigenous to the island. The patterns bear such euphonious names as "crooked
[552] road," "figure eight," "double diamond," "rosebud," "honeycomb," and "black-
[171] berry," and most of them are common to the rest of Ireland, the British Isles, and
[196] other parts of Europe. The term ganzie, in fact, undoubtedly derives from the
Channel island, Guernsey. A widely held belief that each Inis Beag family has
its own distinctive sweater pattern, comparable to the Scottish tartan, by which its
286 drowned members are identified is unfounded. Seventeen women knit for the
291 mainland company, which supplies them with yarn, and are paid between 2
46 pounds and 2 pounds and 10 shillings by weight for each sweater. Some are able
to knit a ganzie in a week, but others take two or three weeks; one woman made 41
sweaters during 1959. A girl working steadily at the knitting factory can earn
slightly more in a week than one knitting a ganzie in that time, but most girls
choose to knit sweaters because they can be at home where their task seems less
[437] tedious. Some women prefer to sell their sweaters to tourists and can on occasion
dispose of a ganzie for as much as 6 pounds, but these women must purchase
their own yarn, and marketing is much less secure as tourists seldom come into
island homes. At present, the finest ganzies are knitted by women in Co. Donegal,
a fact which Inis Beag women admit privately.

286 The woven belt and cowhide shoes of Inis Beag folk have an ancient heri-
294 tage, just as has the *curach*. It is not known when the belt, or *crios*, was introduced
[173] into Ireland, but it has been worn for centuries by Portuguese seamen. Known as
[175] "pampooties," the island style footwear once was worn widely in Ireland, although
made from various hides and skins, and a century ago was cut from sealskin in
[146] Inis Beag. The term pampootie is of Scandinavian origin, and my wife and I have
heard it used among Danish peasants to describe their shoes. Today, a Danish
expatriate who has lived in the island for almost a decade supports himself by
weaving *crios* on a loom for the folk; he also sells them to visitors and to mainland
shops along with woven ties and bookmarks. Although "the Dane" has come to
monopolize the production of belts, several women occasionally make them by
286 hand for their menfolk and to sell. The manufacture of *crios* once was largely in
293 the hands of women, and they wore them sewn to their petticoats and tied at the
462 side, but now it is mostly men who wear them. Three yards long and two inches
175 wide, the belt is woven with a multitude of colors and designs and is worn wrapped
293 twice around the body and tucked in at either side of the waist. Elders prefer
traditional designs and shun the color green because it is unlucky, but young men
[178] are coming to like experimental patterns and all of the basic colors and their many
[822] shades. Contrary to popular opinion, there are no family designs. Some persons,
[177] however, ask for the same pattern every two or three years when they buy a new
crios if they believe that it has brought them luck.

291 Pampooties are favored in Inis Beag because they are ideally suited for wet
[177] rocks and frail canoes. The spiked heels of female tourists and visiting emigrants
who come ashore in *curach* are viewed with trepidation by crewmen, who are sup-